

Titan. The Greek with an advanced intellect achieved a nobler work; but he, too, was indebted in much to the material which so abundantly offered itself to the operation of his skill. But whatever the Greek borrowed from the Egyptians, he borrowed not their mode of treatment for his attic marble; and has not the architecture of the Goth been influenced by his dwelling in the forests? All these races coped with the materials around, according to their nature. They were above the paltry and idle spirit of trying to match the fragments of the mould which had been employed in early time, and flung away: they carefully observed what had been done before, but they advanced. They used the past by the present to create the future. The progress of the human race is beautifully compared by Pascal to the advancing life of a single man: antiquity, he says, was his youth; this period, if he have any, is his age. Similarly also says Lord Bacon. Now, is there any man who acts exactly in his age as he acted in his youth? He is the mere ecclesiologist. Is there any man who utterly rejects the experience of his youth? He is the man who sneers altogether at precedent. Is there any man who determines to remain in the future as he is now? He is one who would strangle the dawning age of progress in its birth, and condemn his remaining days to inaction. And so in architecture: he who would seek no new forms, who would force the material of his day to receive only those shapes, to experience only those modes of treatment which the past supplied for other things; this man, I say, does all he can to check your art; to rear it up on its haunches, and so keep it standing in misery and an uncertain constrained attitude. He deprives the muse of hope, and leaves her to stand petrified, like the wife of Lot, with revealed head, gazing on the terrors of Despair. He is an ungrateful and unprofitable student: he seeks to use the instructions and experience of the past,—to bind the present immovably down: he is of the same spirit as the man who pores over the story of the Cæsars that he may learn how to trample on a free people. And all this you say for clinging to the old forms developed in stone and wood, when we come to work in iron. Yes, all this; because the so doing belongs to that narrow feeling which, just as it would check all social improvements, so also would it check the further development of the arts.*

CHRISTIAN ART—THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN.

I addressed you a short time since upon the title of the picture lately in the Soult gallery, and which, I conceived had, through neglect and ignorance, been lately called the "Conception of the Virgin," and I supported the proposition, that it was a "misnomer," by showing the classification of the pictorial history of the Virgin, and how the subject of the "Conception of the Virgin" had been treated.

A second proposition, in the same letter, pointed to the "Assumption" as the probable correct designation of that painting, surrounded as it is by the attributes appropriated to that phase of the legendary history of the Virgin.

Your correspondent, "T. F. S." combatted the first of these propositions by the assertion that the title, "Conception of the Virgin," was not inappropriate, inasmuch as it was "a contraction of the full title of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception."

Mr. Pullan skillfully unmasked this "hasty and illogical conclusion," and showed the fallacy of this reasoning, by remarking that "unless your readers can be induced to adopt the conclusion that 'the Conception of the Virgin' is a contraction of 'Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception,' and that the terms 'Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception,' and 'the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady,' mean the same thing, they will still believe that there is some meaning in words, and that St. Anne, and not the Virgin, must be the person who figures chiefly

in a representation of 'The Conception of the Virgin.'" Mr. Pullan likewise points to the subject of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, as the possible source from which Murillo derived the idea for this picture, and such a subject, however daring, is of the early periods of Christian art. In the same journal (p. 620), I showed the treatment of the Assumption by various artists from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, as preserved to us, and proved that we had no lack of examples to enable us to conjecture to what period of the legendary history of the Virgin this type of picture belonged,—that the interpretation given by "T. F. S." formed rather a transposition than a contraction,—and distrusted his conclusion on this head as being illogical. I was sceptical as to its truth. I likewise claimed that a most careful and dispassionate watch should be instituted over these subjects,—that no errors might, if possible, creep in,—and that nothing should in these matters be advanced upon any other foundation than recognised treatment, or facts.

I shall not attempt to follow "T. F. S." into all the by-paths of his argument, which he appears to have commenced without a definite idea of his object. I am glad, however, to see that he recognises that the painting in question by Murillo represents "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception." He does not claim the title of the "Conception of the Virgin" for it any longer. He even acknowledges that he did not mean, in using the term "contraction," that it was logically convertible into the title of "Our Lady of the Conception;" but that, as one title had been popularly used for the other for nearly two centuries, he assumes, on the other hand, immediately afterwards, that the error must become law, and asserts his intention "to cling" to it, through a high appreciation of the value of iconology as a science, out of deference to the painter, and an apprehension that a "valuable landmark in the history of theology and art may be sacrificed" should this error be corrected. Iconology, therefore, according to the theory propounded by "T. F. S." is merely intended to catalogue errors, that they may be perpetuated as "landmarks."

"The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception," is, however, but an imperfect, because incomplete, name for this type of picture, which means that and something more besides; and my second proposition to you was, that the "Assumption" was intended to be represented, as we find the figure surrounded by all the attributes previously given to that subject: the inference, therefore, was fairly in favour of such hypothesis.

Your correspondent allows "that Murillo studied and adopted the forms and treatment offered to his contemplation in pictures of the Assumption by earlier schools; but," he proceeds, "he might for all this, have aimed at infusing a new and more perfect spirit of divinity into his subject." This presumption is not borne out by fact of achievement, many of the older Italian school of artists, from whom Murillo drew his ideas, having fully equalled, nay surpassed, in this respect, his masterpiece. The spirit of perfection of form in woman, and more particularly the purity of the "immaculate" was as much sought after, and was attained in a surpassing manner, by the cinque-cento school in Italy, in the portraiture of the Mother of Christ; and these works, which are numerous, carry away the palm from every other school or country. The presumption, therefore, by "T. F. S." that Murillo, having opened a new vein in the mine of art, and "having infused into his pictures a new and more perfect spirit of divinity," should cast about for a title, and appropriate that of "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception" only, is not to be entertained. Cannot your correspondent imagine that "Our Lady" can be portrayed at different periods of her mundane or legendary history,—that the Assumption might be one of them?—and this in accordance with the recognised portraiture? He would have the advantage at least of facts upon which to found his hypothesis.

Yet "T. F. S." after having allowed that

Murillo has called this type of picture "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception," returns to his old error in surmising that the "Conception of the Virgin" may be represented in two manners, as fact or doctrine: the former would, he says, necessitate St. Anne as the principal figure, the latter the Virgin. "T. F. S." must have felt slightly satisfied with his own reasoning upon this subject to seek for this new "solution of a difficulty." The whole pictorial treatment of the Conception of the Virgin is intended to illustrate a doctrine. How can the fact be rendered? The doctrine was intended to be taught—and was taught—through the introduction of the supernatural messenger, Michael, as I have shown, much more lucidly than by this new, fanciful, hypothesis. "Force from on High," formed one of the subjects in the early period of Christian art: here the Virgin would again be surrounded by heavenly attendants. "Our Immaculate Lady," "The Virgin without Stain,"—these are the designations of pictures as old as that period antecedent to the final schism between the eastern and western churches in the eleventh century; but the subjects had not a legendary or supernatural portraiture. It is still, therefore, a question whether in these later instances the Virgin is not represented in the phase of "The Assumption." Without having seen the picture quoted by your correspondent, and in the gallery of Bologna, I should be of opinion that the "Conception" adored by Anne, in celestial glory, is intended for the only truly "Immaculate Conception," that of the Saviour.

In concluding my correspondence upon this subject, I feel glad that it is likely to elicit the abandonment of the term "Conception of the Virgin," lately applied to certain pictures of the Virgin, or "Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception," according to the doctrinaire; whether represented in the act of Assumption, receiving the "Holy Spirit," the "Force from on High," or not. ROBERT HENDRIK.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

THE congested state of the British Museum seems pretty generally admitted; but the mode of treatment proposed by an influential part of the press appears defective in principle. The British Museum is to become the British Library, its other tenants being expelled, with the world before them where to choose a place. For the hortus siccus the air of Kew is recommended; Lincoln's-inn-fields for the skins and skeletons; the portraits are to pack off to Hampton-court; and the statues and vases to the future National Gallery, or, perhaps, the nascent museum of ornamental art; the minerals to Piccadilly (by compression, like the spirits in Milton's "Pandemonium"), and the mummies and other minor matters to—Jericho.

Now, omitting common-places about want of unity and coherence among our institutions in general, and about the word "museum" implying sisterly society, &c.,—is the man of science to read geology here, look at fossils there, and the rocks that yield them somewhere else? Even antiquities are but the last term of geology, and geology the first page of history. To many kinds of books illustrations are all but indispensable, but no delineation is as good as a real object, if you can get it; and the partition of scientific capital aggravates the injury of assigning to one department a specimen on which others have a claim. The naturalist covets out of the sculpture gallery a fine vein of marble (Davy, when in the Vatican, only stopped at one of the statues—"Ah!" he said, "what a beautiful stalactite!"); per contra, there are sundry carved cameos and crystals in his cabinets more precious for their workmanship than the substance it is spent on.

Still something must be determined on: the receiving officer is beginning to look coldly on fresh acquisitions; as if a man declined to accept a donation in regard to the smallness of his purse or pocketbook.

In ordinary life things are distributed in

* To be continued.

* With this the discussion must close.—Ed.